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The Double-Occupation of Palestine

Abstract: This article argues that the recent calm the West Bank is currently experiencing is as a result of the US-Israeli strategy of outsourcing the disciplinary power of the occupation to the Palestinian Authority (PA). It discusses recent security commitments that the US has made to the PA, and popular Palestinian perception of PA soldiers. In addition, considered here is the way in which the governing US/Israel/PA governing strategy is manifesting itself in new spatial formations in the West Bank, from new roads and shopping festivals to new prisons and Palestinian-maintained checkpoints. Finally, raised here is the question as to whether a new resistant politics could possibly emerge from the present status quo, whether yet another generation of Palestinians can be expected to struggle and sacrifice, or whether the post-political malaise currently pervasive in Palestine (and elsewhere) will be perpetuated with the creation of a new generation of apolitical young consumers in the West Bank.

Keywords: Palestine, Israeli Occupation, Neocolonialism, Sovereignty, Prisons

When discussing Israeli military-political strategy in the occupied Palestinian territories, it has become a commonplace caveat in more critical circles to point out that such a strategy should more properly be called a US-Israeli military-political strategy. Consistent with over 40 years of bi-partisan support for Israel and its occupation, the Obama administration has committed itself to a \$30 billion, decade-long military aid commitment to Israel.¹ With the requirement that 75% of this aid be spent on US military contracts, such spending not only subsidizes American weapons manufactures, but also serves to secure American military might in the vitally strategic Middle East through a reliable and relatively stable Israeli proxy, serving as a deterrent to the Syrian and Iranian threat's on Iraq's borders.² Of course, military aid is not the only support that the US provides. Under the US's impartial diplomatic arbitration, peace talks between Israel and self-appointed Palestinian leaders began in September. Having stalled over Israel's refusal to extend its settlement freeze, the US has presented a new carrot to Israel in the form of a \$3 billion military aid contract for the purchase of 20 state-of-the-art F-35 joint strike fighters. In return, the US has asked for another settlement freeze, lasting just 90 days and not including to East Jerusalem. Meanwhile dozens of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem are facing demolition, the Israeli imposed siege continues to strangle the residents of Gaza, who continue to endure almost daily bombardment and attack. All this is done as the dust still settles in the

¹ As a headline by the Israeli daily Haaretz proclaims "Obama won't cut military aid to Israel [...] \$30b promised over next decade will not be harmed by world financial crisis." <http://www.haaretz.com/news/u-s-official-obama-won-t-cut-military-aid-to-israel-1.271902>

Jordan valley following the destruction of an entire Palestinian village³, along with countless homes and other structures throughout the West Bank⁴, not to mention Bedouin villages in inside historic Palestine (Israel proper).⁵

While such military, economic and diplomatic support to Israel is well known, less often discussed is the US's support for the Palestinian Authority, and the vital role such support plays in serving US/Israeli strategic security interests. In addition to the aforementioned \$30 billion dollar aid deal with Israel, the US will also provide "\$500 million in aid to the Palestinian Authority, including \$100 million for the training of Palestinian security forces by American general Keith Dayton".⁶ This aid pledge comes on top of the \$392 million that the US has already given to the West Bank government since 2007, following the US-backed Fateh takeover, ousting the democratically elected Hamas government and relegating it to its Gazan ghetto.⁷ This assistance is intended to bring about the colonial strategy of indigenous self-policing that was envisioned in the Oslo Accords. When Netanyahu speaks in favor of allowing a "demilitarized" Palestinian state to coexist alongside Israel, he does not mean to imply that there will not be Palestinians with guns, he simply means that these guns will be pointed at the Palestinians themselves, away from Israel. Such a strategy allows Israel to continue undermining Palestinian territorial integrity and economic independence, while at the same time allowing a minimal degree of disciplinary power that the Palestinians can wield against themselves, at a far reduced cost to Israel. Rather than a "two state solution", this might more accurately be called a "two flag" solution, as real state sovereignty continues to rest only in the hands of the Israeli government, with certain disciplinary duties outsourced to the Palestinian Authority.

The Shifting Tide of Sovereignty in the Occupied Territories

When I teach my students about the shifting nature of sovereignty in the occupied territories, and the evolving strategies of governance undertaken by the occupying power, I show them a set of pictures depicting the same government building taken at different moments in the occupation.⁸ The building shown is the *muqata'*, located on the outskirts of Nablus in the northern West Bank. The first picture shows the muqata' as

² Benhorin, Yitzhak. "Obama Approves Aid to Israel, PA". *Ynet News*, 18 December 2009.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/1,7340,L-3821976,00.html>

³ Hass, Amira. "IDF Destroys West Bank village after declaring it a closed military zone". *Haaretz*, 21 June 2010.

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/idf-destroys-west-bank-village-after-declaring-it-military-zone-1.303098>

⁴ Amnesty International, "Israel Intensifies West Bank Home Demolitions." 21 July 2010.

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/israel-intensifies-west-bank-palestinian-home-demolitions-2010-07-21>

⁵ Electronic Intifada Report, "Israel destroys Bedouin village, again." *Electronic Intifada*, 5 August 2010.

<http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article11445.shtml>

⁶ Yitzhak. "Obama Approves Aid to Israel, PA".

⁷ Rose, David. "The Gaza Bombshell". *Vanity Fair*, April 2008.

⁸ See Gordon (2008) for an excellent discussion of Israel's governmental strategies in the occupied territories.

it looked when it was built by the British during the mandate period, and later when it was controlled by the Jordanians following the war of 1948, and then used as an Israeli command-post after the 1967 invasion. The imposing structure was originally built in 1937 along with 70 other military-police forts built by the British following the first Palestinian *intifada* of 1936. The forts were commissioned by Sir Charles Tegart, a highly decorated colonial official and engineer who earned a reputation for his ruthless suppression of Bengali nationalism during his tenure as General Inspector of Intelligence and later Commissioner of Police in Calcutta.⁹

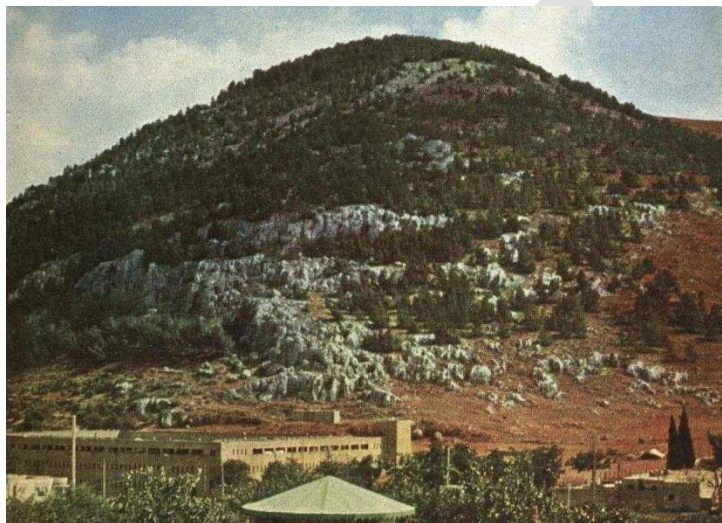


Figure 1: The muqata'a pre-1967, beneath Mount Gerizim upon which an Israeli military outpost is now perched, courtesy of *Palestine Remembered*.

Tegart's forts still stand today in Israel and the occupied territories, serving as museums, government buildings, police stations and jails. Fort Meretz in northern Israel functions as a detention facility for high-level security prisoners, including Lebanese fighters disappeared during the Israeli occupation of Lebanon. Having been erased from official maps, Meretz is now known as Camp 1391, although it is sometimes called "Israel's Guantanamo" in reference to the sexual abuse and torture that takes place within its walls.¹⁰ Presciently, in 1938, a year after his forts were commissioned, Tegart wielded another weapon in his architectural arsenal against the Arab Revolt: a separation barrier. As a *Time Magazine* blurb from 20 June, 1938 reports: "Following a suggestion of mail-fisted Sir Charles Tegart, now adviser to the Palestine Government on the suppression of terrorism, a barbed wire barrier to keep out terrorists is being strung along the entire Palestine frontier at a cost of \$450,000."¹¹ Of course, Tegart's would not be the last attempt

⁹ La Guardia, Anton. "Jericho Jail Creates Own Modern History". *LA Times*, 24 March 2006.

¹⁰ McGreal, Chris. "Facility 1391: Israel's secret prison", *The Guardian*, 14 November 2003.

¹¹ "Palestine: Tegart's Wall", *Time Magazine*, 20 June 1938. The fence was to be built along the northern border with the Lebanon and Syrian mandates, where, as *Time* reports, "a lot of Palestine's tougher Arabs come from". However, according to the report, almost as soon as Sir Charles announced the plans for the fence's completion "a

to enforce colonially imposed boundaries using barriers and barbed-wire, nor would the torture he oversaw in his police forts end with the departure of the British in 1947.

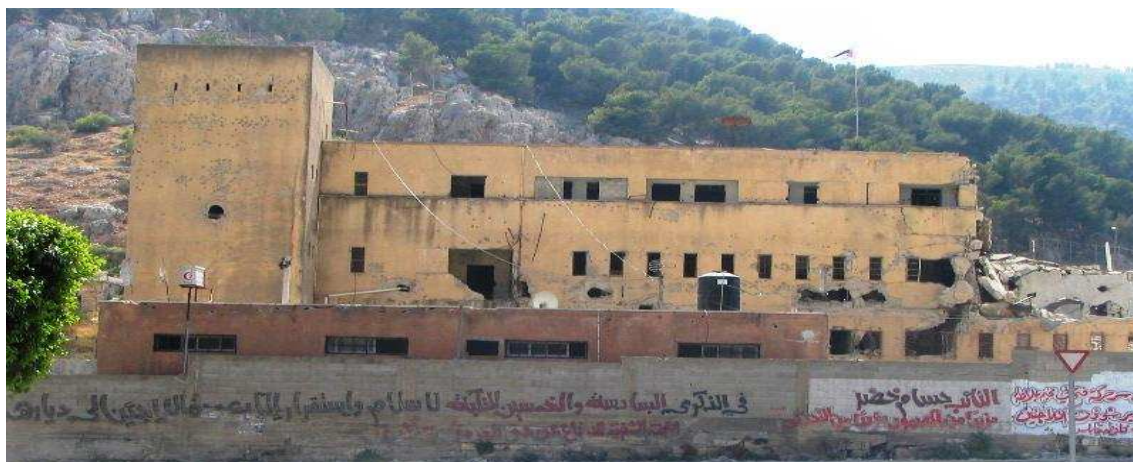


Figure 2: A half-destroyed muqata' building following the invasions in Nablus of 2002 and 2003.

The second picture in this scene of shifting sovereignty is a bullet-ridden, half destroyed version of the original structure. Since 1994, following the Oslo Accords, the muqata' had served as an administrative building, police station and municipal jail for the Palestinian Authority. One of the first objectives of the intensive Israeli invasions of Operations Defensive Shield and Determined Path in 2002, was to seize Palestinian weapons, including any potential deterrent posed by the fledgling Palestinian security forces. A large part of the Oslo “peace plan” was, ironically if not surprisingly, concerned with arming the Palestinian Authority, stipulating the exact strength of its police and security forces. Attacking police stations (also the first targets of Israel’s attack on Gaza in 2008) was an initial step in rolling back the shift in sovereignty that Oslo had ushered in. In so doing, Israel made clear that the authority given to the Palestinian Authority ultimately derived from the Israel, and that at any time the Israeli government could reinstate the direct sovereign violence of the occupation, knowing that Western peace money would be there to rebuild the rubble once the slate had been wiped clean.

band of Arab terrorists swooped down on a section of the fence, dubbed Tegart's Wall, ripped it up and carted it across the frontier into Lebanon.”



Figure 3: The muqata' following its complete destruction in the summer of 2006.

This return to direct sovereign violence is best illustrated by the final picture in this triptych of destruction: a completely gutted muqata' building, torn apart by tanks and bulldozers in the summer of 2006 (as Israel was simultaneously attacking Lebanon and Gaza). Not content with allowing alleged terrorists to sit in a Palestinian jail, Israeli forces leveled the entire complex, killing three prisoners and a staff nurse, and blowing up a large civic archive maintained by the Department of Interior, scattering to the wind birth registries, land deeds and other historical documents dating back to the mandate period, as well as recent passport applications and birth certificates. The destruction represents a complete suspension of the law, both the disciplinary legal authority that the Israelis had outsourced to the Palestinian during the Oslo years, and the biopolitical, bureaucratic governmental authority represented by the birth and death registries.¹²

The Palestinian Neo-Liberal Security State

There is another picture, however, which represents the governmental strategy currently being resurrected in the West Bank. On road the from the Huwara checkpoint, the new Muqata' stands as an unsightly welcome to the city of Nablus. Today visitors are greeted with an entirely new incarnation of the building: a massive, medieval-looking walled structure that has the same hart-sinking effect on the viewer as does the West Bank barrier. The new building is a bigger and better jail, a large solitary confinement cell, as it were, within the much larger carceral space of the occupied territories. A large white billboard and EU flag informs passersby that the prison is being built with the generous support of the European Union.

¹² In March 2006, three months prior to the Nablus invasion, a similar operation was carried out by the Israelis in Jericho under the name "Operation Bringing Home the Goods." The objective was to capture, amongst other prisoners, Ahmed Saadat, an activist with the Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine who was involved in the 2001 assassination of the Israeli Tourism Minister. Saadat had just been elected to the then Hamas-controlled Palestinian legislature, which had announced its intention to release Saadat, in violation of the agreement reached between US President George Bush, Israeli Prime Minister, and the late Yasser Arafat.

Flapping alongside the sign is the faded banner for the first Nablus Shopping Festival of 2009, a spectacle of consumption conspicuously coinciding with the opening of Huwara checkpoint by the Israelis, beaconing the Palestinian citizens of Israel to the great bargains to be found in the economically devastated West Bank, then open to travel for the first time in 9 years. Tony Blair even came to Nablus to mark the occasion of the loosening of the West Bank siege – remarking that not so long ago Nablus was a no-go area for him, but thanks to the generosity of the Israelis, who had strangled the city for just about a decade, there was going to be peace and prosperity for the city. The highlight of the shopping festival was the unveiling of the world’s largest *kunafa*, a sugary, cheesy desert of Nablus fame. Salam Fayyad, the current unelected Prime Minister of Palestine, former World Bank executive, and never one to miss a photo-op, served up the desert to throngs of visitors who clambered over each other to get a piece, under the mistaken impression that, as rumor had it, keys to a new car were hidden somewhere in the sugary mess.¹³ As people gathered under the shadow of Nablus’ new mall (which had served as the scene of many street battles over the last few years until its recent opening), a smattering of spectators milling about Martyr’s Square could be heard murmuring “they’re eating the world’s biggest kunafa while in Gaza they don’t even have sugar for their tea – shame.” Another person agreed, “yeah, the Israelis have turned Palestine into the world’s biggest prison, and the Authority has made it into the world’s biggest joke.”

The image of the bigger and better prison, flanked by signs of a shopping festival, and a notice of foreign funding, sums up perfectly the Palestinian state that the Western powers are eager to create, and that Salam Fayyad is dutifully administering. Unfortunately, the final picture in the series is not here, marked instead by its absence. While trying to inconspicuously photograph the new prison from afar, I attracted the attention of the nearby Palestinian Authority security personnel who guard that particular area. They approached me and demanded my camera, and summarily deleted the images. The disciplinary power of the Palestinian Authority is made apparent with spectacular visibility, as the Authority reasserts itself on the landscape, building prisons where there once was rubble, and putting red-bereted soldiers in place of the masked fighters who stood on the same street corners only a few years ago. This authority, however, is to be seen but not acknowledged.¹⁴

¹³ Following the West Bank takeover, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas appointed Fayyad as Prime Minister under “national emergency” legislation, an appointment that was renewed in May, 2009.

¹⁴ The same is true for another conspicuously situated prison, *al-Juneid*, a former Israeli jail now located adjacent the new campus of an-Najah university – a tortuously tantalizing location for many of the students who are detained there because of their questionable loyalties. The classmates must pass the prison everyday on their way to their courses, a reminder not to speak, not to see, and not to question. A colleague of mine was held there by both the Israelis and the Palestinians. During his latest stay, his CIA-trained Palestinian interrogators tortured and questioned him for weeks, before offering him a college scholarship in exchange for information about his classmates, a deal he refused.

This is the state that Salem Fayyad and his western backers are in the process of constructing – an old-fashioned Arab autocracy with a neoliberal security state twist. Helga Baumgarten, a professor of Political Science at Birzeit University, has characterized the current political moment in the Occupied Territories as being a contest between Hamas’s brand of political Islam on one hand, and an uneasy marriage between the neo-patrimonial corruption and clientelism of Mahmoud Abbas’s ruling Fateh party and the technocratic, donor-supported state building practices of Salem Fayyad.¹⁵ The new Muqata’ is being built at the crux of these competing forces. Western donors have paid private local contractors, likely selected through a system of familio-political patronage, to carry out a massive construction project deemed essential to the state building process, in order to detain prisoners from political factions opposed to this status quo (namely Hamas), and to garrison the security forces whose role is to capture and defeat these dissidents.

With plans to unilaterally declare an independent Palestinian state (again) by 2011, a massive state-building process is underway – and while few new political institutions are being built, plenty of buildings are.¹⁶ An essential part of this state building process is the construction of prisons to lock people up and roads to move goods around, a typical neoliberal spatial arrangement being funded entirely through Western rents. The US Government Accountability Office report evaluating US security assistance to the PA notes this correlation between beefed-up Palestinian security and increased West Bank mobility stating that, the need for “key manned Israeli security checkpoints in the West Bank” has declined due to increased policing efforts on the part of the Palestinians.¹⁷ Salem Fayed has even floated the possibility of letting Palestinian soldiers take over some of the checkpoints. While neoliberal capitalism may be the professed ideology, a swollen state sector kept afloat by Western donors, including US security assistance, is the reality. Indeed, the current economic and building boom that Nablus is experiencing is only partially being driven by the loosening of travel restrictions allowing more shoppers to come to the market; it is largely being fueled by a huge influx of reconstruction money as the US prepares for a final peace push. One of the biggest recipients of this influx of cash, and one of the biggest segments of the bloated bureaucracy, is the Palestinian security sector. Although estimates vary, the Palestinian Authority employs some 60,000 police and soldiers, with another 30,000 civilian employees working in the security sector on the American pay-roll as well.¹⁸ New

¹⁵ Baumgarten, Helga. “Occupied Palestine between Neo-Patrimonialism (Fateh), Technocratic State-Building (Salem Fayyad), the Rule of Political Islam (Hamas), and Rents from the West and the East”, for *The Transformation of Palestine: Palestine and the Palestinians 60 Years after the ‘Nakba’*, Berlin, 8 March 2010.

¹⁶ Brown, Nathan. “Are the Palestinians Building a State?”, *Carnegie Commentary*, June 2010.

¹⁷ Government Accountability Office, “Palestinian Authority: U.S. Assistance Is Training and Equipping Security Forces, but the Program Needs to Measure Progress and Faces Logistical Constraints”, May 2010, p. 26.

¹⁸ These numbers are based on the GAO report cited above, as well as numbers from an older 2006 report called “The Palestinian Security Services: Past and Present” by Husam Madhoun for the Palestinian NGO MIFTAH. These numbers also represent estimates I have heard from Palestinian sources, although exact figures are hard to come

recruits train in large training camps in Jordan under American tutelage and alongside Iraqi army recruits, likewise being trained as a colonial police force guarding against internal dissidents, not foreign occupiers.

Of the \$500 million dollars pledged to the Palestinian Authority by the US State Department for fiscal year 2010, a total of \$400 million dollars is to be spent through USAID on infrastructural projects (much of which being carried out in Area C under Israeli administration, thus helping Israel to ease its burden as occupier), debt servicing, and various other “humanitarian and democracy promotion” projects.¹⁹ The remaining \$100 million dollars is to be spent through the Department of State’s International Narcotics and Law Enforcement account for the purposes of “security reform”.²⁰ The Palestinian Authority is the fifth largest recipient of INCLE funds, coming in behind Afghanistan (\$420 mil), Colombia (\$249 mil), Mexico (\$190 mil), and Pakistan (\$130 mil), and just above Iraq (\$52 mil).²¹ This assistance largely pays for the purchase of non-lethal weapons procurement, infrastructure projects such as the building of new barracks and police stations (Fayyed has called for the construction of twice as many police stations as presently exist), as well as training for the Palestinian National Security Forces and Presidential Guard²² in “gendarmerie tasks” such as handling “temporary hostile situations such as unruly crowds”.²³

The Palestinian National Security Forces had the chance to test their new crowd control training during the Israeli Operation Cast Lead. As Amira Hass reported in the Israeli daily Haaretz, “Ramallah residents were shocked...when a protest against the Israeli offensive in Gaza was forcibly dispersed by Palestinian Authority security forces using tear gas and clubs”.²⁴ Lieutenant General Keith Dayton, the US Security Coordinator between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, characterized this moment, with a third intifada looming in the West Bank, as the greatest challenge the new Palestinian Security Forces had encountered. As Dayton observes, the challenge was met outstandingly:

the new professionalism and competency of the new Palestinian security forces guaranteed a measured and disciplined approach to the popular unrest. Their guidance from the prime minister and president was clear: allow demonstrations, but do not allow them to become violent, and keep the demonstrators away from the Israelis.

by, especially as the security forces informally hire hundreds if not thousands of informants who get paid to report on the conversations they hear in mosques and cafes.

¹⁹ See Lisa Bhungalia’s forthcoming work on this topic.

²⁰ Zanoliti, Jim. “U.S. Security Assistance to the Palestinian Authority”, *Congressional Research Service*, 8 January 2010, p. 14.

²¹ Ibid.

²² In addition to this direct support and training, the US Central Intelligence Agency has also been providing support to the Palestinian General Intelligence Agency and the Orwellian-sounding Preventative Security Organization, both of which, along with the Presidential Guard, report directly to President Mahmoud Abbas, whose term expired in January 2009. See Ian Cobain, “CIA Working Closely with Palestinian Security Agents” in *The Guardian*, 17 December 2009.

²³ GAO, “Palestinian Authority”, p. 13.

²⁴ Hass, Amira. “Palestinian security forces break up Gaza protest,” *Haaretz*, 11 January 2009.

This time, unlike any time in the past, the Palestinian president and prime minister had tools adequate to the task. The IDF also felt—after the first week or so—that the Palestinians were there and they could trust them. As a matter of fact, a good portion of the Israeli army went off to Gaza from the West Bank—think about that for a minute—and the commander was absent for eight straight days. That shows the kind of trust they were putting in these people now.

In short, the PA security forces provided direct assistance to the Israeli attack on Gaza, allowing Israeli commanders to divert forces away from the West Bank to be used in the offensive on Gaza.

Like the jails that everyone sees but ignores, there is an unspoken, or at least quietly murmured, acknowledgement that the Palestinian security is not there to provide security *to* the Palestinians, but *from* them. Riding in a taxi recently with a colleague of mine, a proudly apolitical Palestinian woman from a somewhat privileged family, remarked as we passed through one of the intersections guarded by the Authority, “it’s like, when I see them, I don’t even consider them Palestinians, it’s just another occupation.” I have heard this observation so many times it has become a cliché. In another shared taxi ride I found myself next to a Palestinian man who was on his first return trip to Nablus since the second intifada. Upon passing PA soldiers at the same intersection he asked the driver “are those Arabs or Jews?” To which the driver snorted, “what’s the difference?” Even members of the security forces themselves recognize their role. A colleague of mine was recently arrested, along with over 800 other men following the Hamas shooting in Hebron in last fall. He was held for almost two months, missing the post-Ramadan Eid feast, and being held just long enough to not be able to finish the academic semester, as was the intention of his captors (he has been in and out of Israeli and Palestinian 9 times, and has lost about 4 semesters during those periods). During his time there, one of his temporary cellmates was a Palestinian Authority soldier, who had been accused of raping a boy. After some time he confessed to his cellmates, “we’re all criminals. You think we’re a national army? We’re trained by the Americans, we’re basically another Israeli division.”

In popular discourse, there are two countervailing sentiments I hear repeatedly in Nablus. One, states: *ma fi qanoon*, there is no law, in the sense of there being no rights, no justice, and no system to address social ills or redress abuse and corruption. The other statement I hear is the exact opposite, *fi qanoon*, there is law. Law and order have finally been restored in Nablus, and people can walk about freely and drive in the streets without fear of clashes or violence. In a way, both statements are true. There is law, in that there is law enforcement, police officers and soldiers who give a feeling of governmental control and stability after many years of *fawda*, chaos. But there isn’t a stably functioning Palestinian legislature actually passing laws, nor is there an independent judiciary enforcing the laws, or a functioning civil court system. Rather there is a system of familial and political patronage, and an authoritarian system of maintaining order, rounding up anyone whose loyalty is uncertain. What is still to be determined is whether this authoritarian law enforcement is just a necessary step that must be taken to provide the stability necessary to attract much

needed foreign investment and to finally build the legal and civil institutions vital to the creation of a Palestinian state, as its apologists in the State Department would claim. Or whether this Palestinian state will ultimately obstruct the freedom that Palestinians yearn for.

Post Script

Recently I made a visit to a friend of mine in Balata refugee camp. I visited him and his wife, an elementary school teacher, in their family home, which he recently completed after 10 long years of piecemeal construction. He is a clever young man, especially good with languages. He is also religiously devout, but moderately so, as his clean-shaven face belies, and he is equally devoted to his nation. In short, he is the perfect candidate for the *mukhabarat*, the secret security forces, which he just recently joined. He serves his duty, but he is not without his doubts. While sitting on his roof in the early evening light he confessed that “the things I do every day, the things I’m ordered to do, would have gotten me executed as a collaborator in this camp just a few years ago, but now it’s policy. During the day we do Israel’s dirty work, and at night we hide in our holes from them as they finish the job. How can we call ourselves security when during the day we work for the people we need security from and at night we hide from them?” Being on the American pay-roll does not necessarily a loyal follower make. While the state-building process is securely in the hands of pro-Western clients now, it is entirely uncertain what will happen when this old guard is overtaken by a new generation of leaders. Will they be emboldened by the shift in regional power dynamics, as Turkey, Syria and Iran assert themselves against the declining influence of Israel and US? Or will they want to build malls and go shopping? Having sacrificed so much, and lost so many years, one cannot blame Palestinians, especially the youth, for grasping this moment of normality and enjoying it as much as possible. And yet, and many Palestinians, are left wondering, how long will this momentary illusion of normalcy last, and at what price is it being purchased?